United Nations S/PV.7701

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7701st meeting
Friday, 27 May 2016, 3.05 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Aboulatta	(Egypt)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mrs. Schwalger
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Fesko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/460)

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16-15148 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/460)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. O'Brien, who is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/460, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: I returned yesterday from a town called Reyhanlı, in Turkey, just across the border from Syria. What I saw there was harrowing — orphaned Syrian girls and boys ranging from toddlers to young teens with no family left to look after them. I went to a hospital and met Syrians who had been injured after the internally displaced person (IDP) camp they had fled to in Syria to escape violence was itself recently bombed. I sat down at Dr. Mazin's bedside as he struggled for life with appalling and severe brain, abdominal and facial wounds, after he was struck by an air strike on Al-Quds hospital in eastern Aleppo on 27 April, as he was bravely himself saving lives. A bare whisper was all he could muster: "Please, peace". I met refugee families traumatized by the effects of five years of constant war who dream of nothing more than returning to Syria to live a normal life.

I promised to carry their stories to the Security Council. I promised to highlight once more the tragic and ever-worsening situation in Syria. But truth be told, I have run out of words to fully explain how the actions of the parties to the conflict have led to the devastation of a country and its people. As the war continues, it is innocent civilians and children who continue to be subjected to even greater levels of suffering and misery than could ever have been imagined five years ago.

I remain particularly concerned at the upsurge in violence across various parts of the country and its impact on civilians. Indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, mosques and public markets, continue with impunity and total disregard for international humanitarian law. In early May, scores of civilians were killed and injured by strikes hitting two IDP settlements in Sarmada, Idlib. These were places where displaced people had sought sanctuary from the conflict. One of the strikes reportedly hit a school tent, resulting in the deaths of eight children. Just this week, several terrorist attacks claimed the lives of over 100 civilians in the coastal cities of Jableh and Tartous. Over 40 patients and accompanying family members were killed and 35 people injured when a suicide bomber walked into the Jableh hospital and detonated an explosives belt. An emergency doctor and two nurses died in that explosion, with another 11 health workers wounded. Similarly, Ziad Al-Buqaa hospital — Khan Al-Shih's last operational hospital serving people in Khan Al-Shih, Zakia and surrounding areas — was reportedly struck by barrel bombs on 17 May. This hospital provided medical services to 4,200 patients daily and served about 100,000.

The continued use of siege and starvation as a weapon of war is reprehensible. We are continually monitoring the situation on the ground throughout Syria and, based on the latest information, we now estimate that some 592,700 people are currently living in besieged areas. This includes 452,700 people besieged by the Government of Syria in various locations in rural Damascus, as well as in the Al-Waer area of Homs city, an area that I visited myself just a few months ago, but which has been closed off since March. Elsewhere, 110,000 people are besieged by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Deir ez-Zor city, 20,000 people by non-State armed groups and the Al-Nusra Front in

Foah and Kefraya in Idlib, and 10,000 besieged by the Government of Syria and non-State armed groups in Yarmouk, Damascus.

These figures are shocking, as they underscore the sharply deteriorating situation for civilians, even while the cessation of hostilities is in place. According to the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/460), the number of people in besieged areas was 517,700, itself up from 486,7000, due to more accurate numbers of people emerging from Deir ez-Zor, Foah and Kefraya, and Yarmouk, as the facts on the ground have changed. But I must reinforce that these figures are really shocking. Today, 592,700 people are living in besieged areas because of the appalling deteriorating situation in Al-Waer on the other side of the very line I myself crossed last year, as reported to the Council in detail.

The punishment of civilians through besiegement tactics must stop immediately. The primary responsibility lies with the party that maintains the siege and routinely and systematically denies people the basic necessities of life and freedom of movement. However, other parties that conduct military activities in or from populated areas, endangering their safety, also bear their share of responsibility for the immense suffering in besieged areas. And we cannot ignore the fact that many on all sides are profiting handsomely at the expense of innocent civilians from their ability to control the goods that enter through irregular and unofficial channels.

The humanitarian and protection situation in many hard-to-reach areas also remains critical, including in some that are on the brink of besiegement. I remain extremely concerned about the conditions for the hundreds of thousands of civilians in northern rural Homs, specifically in the towns of Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldo, as well as in the adjacent area of Habarnafse in rural Hama. People in these areas have limited freedom of movement and diminished access to clean water, medical care and food. The recent humanitarian convoys to northern rural Homs were vital but must be followed up by greater access if we are to alleviate the suffering of civilians.

The situation across Aleppo governorate also remains alarming for civilians. In northern Aleppo, just across the border from Turkey, the situation for tens of thousands of people is precarious, with many having been displaced multiple times this year alone as a result of heavy fighting between non-State armed groups and ISIL. That fighting is ongoing as of today and is likely to fuel further displacement and vulnerability along the border areas.

In Aleppo city, fighting has continued to affect civilians over the past few weeks and also had an impact on humanitarian operations. The United Nations hub in the western part of the city has repeatedly been hit by shelling, while access for cross-border aid to assist 300,000 people in eastern Aleppo city, along Castello road, the last remaining route into the area, has been repeatedly cut due to air strikes and heavy fighting.

The current reality in Syria is not something that we should or can accept. There should never be impunity for behaviour that shows complete disregard for international humanitarian law, flouts the resolutions of the Security Council, and causes such immense human suffering. One day all those responsible must and will be held to account.

Despite the extremely challenging environment, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organization partners continue their tireless efforts to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of the Syrian population. Millions of people were reached with assistance in April, while UNICEF and the World Health Organization began another nationwide immunization campaign to reach 2 million children. And cross-border shipments provided food aid to over a million people, as well as other types of assistance to tens of thousands more.

Cross-line inter-agency operations to besieged, hard-to-reach and other priority locations have continued, with over 800,000 people reached this year in these areas, and many more than once. We have very recently gained access to besieged eastern Harasta with food and other humanitarian supplies for 10,000 people — a first since March 2013, over three years ago. In addition, since 10 April, the World Food Programme successfully carried out 44 high altitude airdrops over the besieged city of Deir-ez-Zor. These airdrops mean that 762 metric tons of urgently needed food assistance, distributed by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent on the ground, reached approximately 100,000 people.

But several weeks of air drops have brought an amount of food equivalent to only one convoy. Let me repeat that several weeks of air drops have brought an amount of food equivalent to only one convoy by road, and the Council should have no doubt about the

challenges our partners are facing to deliver assistance by air. Airdrops are an option of last resort; they are costly, dangerous and technically very challenging. However, as I have said before, the gravity and scale of need means that the United Nations must consider such options, but only as a last resort, and not forgetting that the United Nations would require the approval of the Government of Syria.

Deliberate interference and restrictions by the parties, notably the Syrian Government, continue to prevent effective aid delivery. For example, on 20 April, the United Nations submitted its inter-agency convoy plan for the month of May, which included requests to reach 904,750 people across 35 besieged, hard-to-reach and priority cross-line locations. The Syrian authorities granted approval in full to only 14 locations, with 224,000 people, and approvals conditional on the type and amount of assistance to another eight locations, for some 306,000 people. That effectively left more than 40 per cent of the planned target population, including in Aleppo, Al-Waer, and Talbiseh, without access to basic necessities and food. That of course leaves me extremely concerned. We recently submitted our plan for June with a request to reach 1.1 million people in 34 besieged, hard-to-reach and other priority cross-line locations, including all the places we could not reach in May. I call on the Syrian Government to approve the plan in full and to remove any and all conditions, not least regarding the amount or type of aid that can be delivered.

Even for the locations that were approved for deliveries in May, the Syrian Government has severely curtailed the ability of the United Nations to reach those in need. A convoy and assessment mission to Darayya, where 4,000 civilians have been besieged for almost four years, scheduled for 12 May, had to be aborted due to unconscionable last-minute restrictions imposed by Government security forces. At the last checkpoint, Government forces removed all basic supplies, including nutritional items for infants. No conclusion can be drawn other than that this was simply an effort to further punish civilians, and this time infants. Similarly, an inter-agency convoy that was supposed to reach Mu'addamiyah on 14 May was unable to deploy. Security force representatives never turned up at the warehouse to monitor the loading of trucks, as previously agreed, despite constant outreach at various levels. As a result, the convoy was never given permission to depart. At the same time, non-State armed groups continue to prevent a United Nations assessment mission from proceeding to the besieged towns of Foah and Kafraya in Idlib governorate.

Moreover, the removal of life-saving medicines and medical supplies such as surgical, midwifery and emergency kits has continued unabated, with supplies for an estimated 150,000 treatments removed from convoys since the beginning of the year. Since the adoption of resolution 2139 (2014), medical supplies for more than 650,000 treatments have been removed from aid convoys. Such restrictions are not only violations of earlier guarantees and approvals obtained from the Syrian Government and other parties, they are deliberately and cynically designed to inflict more unnecessary suffering on civilians living in besieged and hard-to-reach locations.

As the Council knows, the international community came together in Istanbul earlier this week for the World Humanitarian Summit, called for by the Secretary-General. I emphasized at the Summit that we must all live up to our responsibility, collectively and individually, to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people and make a real difference for the people who need our help most. Syria is a stark example of why the Secretary-General called for the Summit. As he has said, we are one humanity, with a shared responsibility not only to keep people alive, but to give people a chance at life in dignity. The bottom line is that, politically, we continue to fail the people of Syria dismally in that regard.

On 17 May, the International Syria Support Group called on all parties to the Syrian conflict to immediately comply with the terms of the cessation of hostilities. It further called for the lifting of all sieges and urged the Syrian Government to swiftly approve United Nations delivery requests in their entirety. Frankly, the parties to the conflict, and those with influence over them, urgently need to turn this into decisive, positive action that can have a direct, positive effect on Syrian lives on the ground.

However, let me state clearly that protecting civilians and granting access should never be dependent on political negotiations or as a bargaining chip for ad hoc deals on the ground. These are fundamental tenets of international humanitarian law and must be respected by the parties and all who support them. There must be access to those in need, and not just to a third of those in need, but to all; not just one-off deliveries, but sustained, immediate and unimpeded humanitarian

access throughout the country; not just access to deliver vaccines, but the full package of supplies, including medical and surgical items, delivered on the basis of the needs assessments made by the United Nations. The sieges have to be lifted once and for all, and immediately. They exist today only because of a lack of will to end them. Millions of women, men and children and, as I mentioned early in my statement, Dr. Mazin — struggling for life in that bed in Reyhanli and all across Syria — each and every one of them depends on the Council's action, right now.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I was expecting the Under-Secretary-General to begin his statement by offering his condolences to the Government and the people of Syria for the hundreds of innocent civilian victims in Jableh and Tartus who perished a few days ago. The Council denounced that action and express its condolences in a press statement a couple of days ago.

Like the Council, I was surprised to hear what the Under-Secretary-General said about his visit to Turkey and what he saw there — surprising things, as he put it, in Syrian refugee camps in Turkey. He saw children who had no food to eat. What I would like to ask him, and the Council, is what happened to the billions pledged at various conferences in Kuwait and elsewhere for the host countries Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon? What happened with the propaganda being put out in the countries of the Gulf and elsewhere that talks about the refugee camps as if they were five-star hotels? Why does the Under-Secretary-General not know about the Saudi cleric Abdullah Al-Muhaysini, who recruits children and acts as a mufti for the terrorist group Ahrar Al-Sham, which is expanding in northern Aleppo and Idlib? Those are facts that we have to consider. What he said about Jableh and Tartus, which were shelled during a suicide attack by a terrorist, is an incomplete description, to put it mildly. He knows perfectly well that Da'esh and Ahrar Al-Sham claimed responsibility for the terrorist acts there, and the perpetrators' identity is therefore very well known to him.

Some Council members claim to be concerned by the humanitarian situation and the protection of human rights in Syria. These States hold meetings, make statements and issue communiqués right, left and centre, as though they were doves of peace and only worried about the prosperity, stability and peace of the Syrian people. That is how they present themselves. However, the reality is very different because anyone who wants to know can just look at the behaviour of these States and see that they play a critical role in the suffering of the Syrian people and the tragedy that has befallen them, as well as in the way it is being treated, as recalled in the statements on the protection of civilians in Syria, Iraq and Libya.

Some States protect the terrorist entities, including within the Security Council. That became obvious when some refused to label Jaysh Al-Islam a terrorist organization in the Security Council, despite the request made by the Russian Federation. Those bodies work in an alliance was with Jabhat Al-Nusra, which is a terrorist organization, and commit terrorist acts every day. Jaysh Al-Islam targets civilians in their shelters in Damascus and Aleppo and other cities. They perpetrate terrorist acts. Recently such acts were carried out together with Da'esh in Jabla and Tartus in Syria, as was just mentioned. This, as I said, resulted in hundreds of innocent lives lost. Those same States refused yesterday the request of the Syrian Government to call Jaish-e-Mohammad a terrorist organization.

This situation becomes more glaring when these same States invite these groups to participate in the Geneva negotiations, as though there were such a thing as moderate terrorism and as though they would both allow and not allow terrorism. The same States enable the access of representatives of these entities into their countries and allow them access to the media. That was the case with the head of Jabhat Al-Nusra, who was received by the Qatari channel Al-Jazeera on several occasions, and with the representative of foreign relations of Ahrar Al-Sham, who was in the United States on a British passport in January. There was an article about that in the Washington Post, on 18 July 2015, and in the Telegraph. This is an attempt to burnish the image of that terrorist group, to use terrorist groups for political blackmail and to implement a particular agenda.

This has become obvious in the statements made by the representatives of these States — including the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia and Turkey, as well as other countries — when they clearly threaten to maintain their support for terrorism in Syria unless the leadership is changed. The same

States impose unilateral illegal economic sanctions on the Syrian people. That increases the suffering of the Syrian people and is a huge burden on the public and private sectors, which are trying to provide food stuffs, pharmaceuticals and ensure the people's basic needs are met. This has forced some sectors of the population to leave Syria out of a sense of insecurity and a lack of subsistence, but the Council ignores this dire humanitarian situation in Syria.

How can we talk about putting an end to the suffering and tragedy of the Syrian people inside and outside the country and putting an end to the humanitarian crisis in Syria? How can we know that the humanitarian and political situation is uncertain? What can we do to implement some of our goals? Suffering should not be used by certain Governments as a tool for political and other types of blackmail, as President Erdoğan did a couple of days ago when he threatened to change the refugee situation if Turkish nationals were not given a visa exemption for European countries. How can the humanitarian situation improve when President Erdoğan uses Turkish territory, including the United Nations corridors, as a transit area for tens of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters? Furthermore, the Turkish regime provides weapons to terrorists and uses humanitarian convoys as a cover.

The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria appears not to know about any of this, despite the fact that I myself told him about it on several occasions. Furthermore, we have drawm the attention of members of the Security Council to this matter in detail in our official communications. The Erdoğan regime imprisons customs officers, judges and reporters who describe the situation honestly. Why is it that the Secretariat rewarded the Erdoğan regime by holding the first World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul when the regime allows children to be recruited in refugee camps?

How can we put an end to the crisis without addressing the violations of the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism, in particular resolution 2253 (2015), which deals with training for terrorism committed by Israel, Qatar and Saudi Arabia? This has clear consequences for the security and stability of the region.

I would like to discuss the way that the issue of humanitarian access is manipulated. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/460) presents this inaccurately, and what he describes is very far from the reality and based on unreliable sources. Two days ago we sent two identical letters to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General with regard to this matter, but I will limit myself to simply underscoring the following points.

The claim that the Syrian Government prevents the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Darayya is totally false. In fact, the Syrian Government allowed the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to enter Darayya on 17 May to provide humanitarian assistance. The representative of the ICRC informed the Foreign Ministry that it was not able to enter Darayya owing to logistical administrative and security reasons. When it comes to the reservations raised by some with regard to medical supplies, the Government of Syria agrees to allow medical assistance to be provided to all regions except for tools that can be used by terrorists.

The Government of Syria stands ready to cooperate with the United Nations to address all convoy-related issues. As regards inter-agency convoy requests, I recall that the United Nations submitted 26 requests for inter-agency humanitarian assistance convoys for hot areas in May, within the framework of the May plan. The Syrian Government accepted 19 of those 26 requests. As I said, 19 were accepted, but as of 24 May —two days ago — the United Nations had sent only three convoys out of the 26 requested. The Government of Syria accepted 19 and the United Nations only sent three inter-agency humanitarian assistance convoys. If there are sometimes delays when it comes to authorizations and their implementation, that is a result of our concern for the safety and security of humanitarian workers, and the concern that humanitarian assistance reach those to whom it is destined.

The Government of Syria remains committed to reducing the humanitarian suffering of our people. We are ready to implement any national measures needed in order to attain that objective. We continue to cooperate with the United Nations and to facilitate the work, but cooperation is not a one-way street. The United Nations also has to cooperate, coordinate and consult with the Syrian Government when it comes to humanitarian assistance, instead of criticizing it and calling it into question without result. The United Nations and other international organizations have, in the five years of the crisis' existence, been able to get

humanitarian assistance to millions of people thanks only to the cooperation of the Government of Syria.

Lastly, we frequently talk of the danger of terrorism and the importance of fighting terrorism. That should not be interpreted to suggest that we do not understand the depth of the humanitarian crisis in some regions of Syria or that we do not understand the importance of improving the humanitarian situation in Syria. On the contrary, we do. However, we believe that in order to put a lasting end to the humanitarian crisis, we need to deal with the issue seriously, and to tackle terrorism that is supported from the outside and external interference in our internal affairs, and not through financial contributions pledged in various conferences as a matter of form — although those contributions have their own significance.

The Syrian Government underscores the importance of the political dimension. We participated in the Geneva negotiations seriously. The problem was that some States had imposed the Riyadh delegation as the only interlocutor. That delegation came with preconditions, which were to ensure that the negotiations failed. Indeed, they withdrew on several occasions, following direct instructions from their sponsors.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I do not want to take much time here, but I am struck by the number of factual claims that have been made by the Ambassador from Syria that impugn the reputation of the United Nations and the brave humanitarians who are trying to get food to people who are being starved — to death, in many cases. I think there is some irony in a Government that pulls infant formula, anaesthetics and surgical equipment off of convoys and that does not even deign to respond to successive United Nations requests, accusing the United Nations of not showing up with convoys when there are people starving. But, I am not the authority on this matter; the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is. As such, I would like to ask Under-Secretary-General O'Brien to respond to some of the allegations made by the Syrian ambassador.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: As I have said on many occasions before, my only authority comes from attempts to ensure that we gather facts from the best sources possible — both with our own eyes on the ground and from those we are able to trust to produce the facts — and to relay them to the Security Council in a completely fair and honest manner. Where there are reports rather than seen facts, we make judgments about the quality of those reports. So, having laid out the best information we have available, I stand by all the facts I outlined in the statement I just made to the Council.

I can certainly stand by the facts I gave early in my statement because that was my personal testimony, in particular my sitting down at the bedside of Dr. Mazin as he struggled for life, barely able to whisper. All he could muster to say was "Please, peace". I think that sums up precisely why we need to raise ourselves above the level of disputes on the numbers, which simply do not pay sufficient respect to the deep needs of the people who are doing their very best to help or those who continue to struggle after five years of a fight that could be brought to an end if there were sufficient political will — not least from the Government, which represents an alternative factual base. I stand by the facts that I presented, and I am more than happy to write to the Council at a later stage, setting out further helpful background details.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should simply like to raise a question with regard to procedure here in the Council, because it is my understanding that this was to be a briefing followed by private consultations. Are we going to be discussing Mr. O'Brien's briefing in public meeting or is it going to be in consultations? If it is public, then we should begin the discussion here, but I believe that otherwise we should be conducting this discussion in closed consultations.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The President of the Council cannot prevent anyone from taking the floor, but I propose that we begin our private consultations so that we can hear from Mr. O'Brien.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arabic Republic to make a further statement.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I regret having to take the floor for a second time. I will be brief. I would like to say that I too presented irrefutable facts. We are perfectly open to hearing any explanation that might contradict what I have stated. We do not wish to harm the reputation of the United Nations, as we are one of its founding Member States. I am here as a representative of that Member State. We are proud of having been a founding Member State and have always tirelessly defended the United

Nations. However, the Organization is not composed exclusively of angels; I wish to combat its demons.

The representative of the United States remarked that I did not refer to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/460), but that is inaccurate. Everything I said was with respect to that report. We are not levelling accusations; rather, we are calling the attention of Council members to problems related to humanitarian assistance. On several occasions, we have said that Turkey is using United Nations corridors to move weapons. Mr. O'Brien and his colleagues have not responded to that statement.

A few days ago, it was revealed that the Erdoğan regime was sending weapons along the corridors. He has imprisoned customs officers, journalists and judges. If that was an attack on the United Nations, it would mean that the information about Turkey was false, and that the statement made by the Ambassador of the United States proves that it did not occur.

We are familiar with the cases of Libya and Iraq, and I do not want to add Africa to that. Everyone knows what is going in Africa. We want the work of the United Nations to reflect its Charter. We do not want a new Charter, casually rewritten according to new rules. We must defend the dignity and sovereignty of States, not the attacks that are constantly being made on that dignity and sovereignty, and we must aid their citizens.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.